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FRANK FARLEY SPEAKS ON EARLY RED DEER

At the annual meeting of the Central Alberta Old Timers' Association held in April, Frank L. Farley, of Camrose, gave an interesting address on the early days of this district. The following account is reprinted from the Camrose Canadian.

More than two hundred members and representatives of the younger generation were present. Twelve in the audience stood up when Mr. Farley asked how many had been in the settlement 50 years ago. They had been either resident in the little hamlet or occupying homesteads in the area at that time.

Mr. Farley, accompanied by two other young men, arrived at noon on Tuesday March 31, 1892, he recalled, preceeding to name all those who had been resident in the village then, less than a hundred, while about fifty settlers were scattered about on the land contiguous to the new centre.

Main street was simply a trail. Red Deer was the only urban centre between Calgary and Edmonton, which boasted a population of about 1,000 persons each. There was no physician, no dentist and no banking institution.

On April 3, Mr. Farley walked to Poplar Grove (Innisfail) 21 miles and bought a cayuse, which he rode to Red Deer the next day. This small pony was the means of transportation used in the survey made of the countryside with a view to locating desirable homesteads.

It was said good land would be found in the southeast, and several days, accordingly, were spent in that area. The three prospective farmers finally, out of the vast territory open to them, located in township 37, range 26, about mid-way between Pine Lake and Red Deer. Unknown country, at least unknown to all practical intents and purposes, stretched away to the distant eastern horizon. A rancher, Bill Schraeder, was

Mr. Farley's nearest neighbor, and was a mile distant. Beyond was one other settler, a Frenchman, located on Quill Lakes, near the present village of Delburne. There was actually no one else in the east until the settlement of Clark's Crossing (Saskatoon), was reached. On June 10, Mr. Farley and one of his neighbors made a trip eastwards to the Red Deer River and viewed the great coal seams along the banks, and in three days' ride they did not meet a single person.

Farming prospects he recalled were anything but bright. While Wheat could be ripened in favorable seasons. frost generally caught the crop. Early ripening varieties had not been developed then, and Red Fife, which had made Manitoba famous, was too late for Alberta. Ladoga wheat was brought in from Northern Russia and ripened earlier but not considered suitable for flour manufacture. It was not until Dr. Saunders, of the Dominion Experimental Farm, Ottawa, made the wonderful discovery of Marquis (early, a heavy yielder, possessing flour-making qualities of the highest), that wheat growers in this section of the west had their difficulty solved in this branch of farming.

Mr. Farley records that in early days wheat had no market excepting to new settlers for seed or chicken feed. Not a single elevator marked the sky-line between Calgary and Strathcona (Edmonton) for many years following the first settlement.

Wonderful yields of oats were obtained and the chief variety was the famous Banner variety which sometimes went a hundred bushels to the acre and weighed 45 to 50 pounds to the bushel. The Crow's Nest Pass railway was built in 1897-98, and then came a good market for oats, the first time there had been a market for this grain.

Buyers actually came out to the threshing machines and contracted for oats at from 35¢ to 40¢ a bushel; these had to be bagged for shipping.

The first creamery established between Calgary and Strathcona was located a few miles southeast of Red Deer, and the farmers were paid ten cents a pound for their butterfat. Before that time, the settlers made butter and shipped it to Calgary and generally received the same price as for butterfat, but occasionally there was no market and it was shipped back to the senders.

For years it was argued the country was too cold for the succesful raising of hogs, but there were those who determined to make test cases and before long more hogs were produced than could be sold on the market. All hogs in those days were "dressed" on the farms, and the price paid by merchants was fro 4¢ to 5¢ a pound. The advance that has taken place in hog production in the past fifty years has been one of the most remarkable in the economic history of the province, Mr. Farley stated, in remarking that Alberta now supercedes Ontario in this branch of farming.

As may be imagined, many trials and tribulations were borne by the early settlers. Few had sufficient money to purchase machinery and horses, or to buy materials to complete their homes. Fortunately, timber was plentiful and of sufficient size to build houses, batns and other out-buildings. Fencing was accomplished by using poplar rails and willow stakes to keep the rails in place. During the first few winters, every able-bodied man was a woodsman, and hundreds of logs and thousands of fence rails and stakes were secured and drawn home usually on hand-made sleighs with runners made out of birch trees.

The first bank to open between Calgary and Strathcona was in 1902 when the Merchants' Bank began operations in Red Deer with a Mr. Hill as manager. Mr. Farley was in town the day he arrived, so went to his hotel room and introduced himself. He told Mr. Hill he wished to discount two school board notes and Mr. Farley had the $80, representing two months' teacher's

salary. Mr. Farley still has the first pass book ever issued in the area between Edmonton and Calgary.

In 1896 he went to Cochrane to buy a team of horses. He got the team of geldings, each about 1100 pounds in weight, and have his not for $100 for a year. In the fall, while plowing, a traveller driving a team stopped to ask if there were any good farms nearby. Mr. Farley told him of one with a spring over on section 22-37-26, at the same time telling the stranger to put his team in the stable and stop for a while. Next day the land-seeker was taken over, shown the land, and a deal was made to have 100 logs cut and delivered on the place. Eventually a notice was sent to the man (a tailor) in Calgary, that the work had been done. Mr. Farley had word the Calgarian would not be able to pay for the work, but would send two suits of clothes if he wished. Mr. Farley bethought himself of the Cochrane rancher. He might be able to afford two new suits, so he wrote to him. The rancher accepted and went to Calgary and secured the clothes. This was an excellant study of economics in a new country without the use of money, Mr. Farley said, for the farmer paid for his horses, the homesteader for his building materials, and the rancher got the suits without the use of any currency whatever.

Red Deer took elections pretty seriously in those early days. There were only two parties -- Grits and Tories -- and from the moment an election was announced, the battle was on.

In 1896, Frank Oliver (now deceased) was candidate for all of Alberta -- it was then a territory. Mr. Farley told of the gerrymander that made it necessary for the voters of Willowdale settlement to go to Pine Creek to vote.

A dozen voters in Willowdale were nearly all Liberals; the same number in

Pine Lake. It looked as if Willowdale voters would not be able to take the time to negotiate the 12 miles to the booth. However, the farmers met, and means were found to get the entire party to the lake. A trail was found and before noon on election day the entire "vote" arrived by teams and wagons. Result was a tie!

Mr. Oliver campaigned in the area and at a meeting at a farmer's house (in June) and while the crowd was gathering, some hefty discussions took place. During a debate one of the men, from a distance, said to the candidate: "A Tory I was born, and a Tory I will die, and if I though there was any Grit blood in this little finger, I'd cut it off," whereupon Mr. Oliver retorted: "It' s too bad there isn't some Grit blood in your head."

Mr. Farley remembers the first threshing machine operated in the Red Deer district, with power generated by horses. There were no self-feeders and no straw-blowers. The first gasoline engine came onto the scene in the late nineties. The first moving pictures he ever saw were shown at a small hall in Penhold. Narcisse Marion, farmer near Old Red Deer, was the "orchestry" for the district and was a famous fiddler for many years.

Red Deer district, Mr. Farley said, was fortunate in attracting a fine type of citizen, and the town is undoubtedly one of the most progressive in all of Western Canada.

In introducing Mr. Farley, the chairman, W. E. Payne, K.C., intimated that Camrose, although considerably younger in years, is looked upon by Red Deerites as comparing most favorably with the oldest of the settlements lying between Ednonton and Calgary, namely Red Deer.